

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1060

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 0653

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PORC, PFOR, US, BM

SUBJECT: MULTILATERAL AFFAIRS: GUB POSITION

REF: STATE 37591

SUMMARY

BURMA HAS LONG TAKEN A POSITION OF NONALIGNMENT THAT TRADITIONALLY HAS MEAN ABSTENTION ON CONTENTIOUS ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL FORA. IN PAST YEAR, HOWEVER, BURMESE HAVE MOVED SOMEWHAT TOWARD A MORE ACTIVE "THIRD WORLD" APPROACH; THIS WAS SEEN IN THEIR VOTE FOR THE PRO-NORTH KOREAN RESOLUTION IN THE 30TH UNGA. PRESSURES BY OTHER COUNTRIES SEEM TO HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON BURMESE AND WE HAVE LITTLE LEVERAGE IN ANY CASE. WHILE BURMA MAY FOLLOW ALONG MORE CLOSELY WITH THE NAC CROWD, WE BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL GENERALLY CONTINUE TO ADOPT A LOW-KEY, NON-CONTENTIOUS POSTURE IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING IS ANALYSIS OF LIKELY BURMESE POSITION ON MULTILATERAL QUESTIONS AS REQUESTED PARA 7 (REFTEL).

2. TRADITIONALLY, BURMESE POSTURE IN INTERNATIONAL FORA WAS IN KEEPING WITH ITS POLICY OF TRUE NONALIGNMENT VIS A VIS THE MAJOR WORLD POWERS (BURMA, ALONG WITH YUGOSLAVIA, WAS ONE OF THE FIRST POST-WWII STATES TO ADOPT A NONALIGNED STANCE). IN PRACTICE,
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THIS MEANT A LOW KEY POSITION IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES AND STUD-

IOUS, ALMOST CATATONIC, NEUTRALITY ON CONTENTIOUS ISSUES, ESPECIALLY WHERE THE GREAT POWERS ARE INVOLVED. IN ITS BILATERAL FOREIGN RELATIONS, THIS POLICY LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS, WHERE FEASIBLE, WITH BOTH SIDES OF DIVIDED STATES, E.G., FRG AND GDR, NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA, NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM. POLICY ALSO MEANT GUB REPRESENTATIVES AVOIDED TAKING ANY INITIATIVES IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES, DID NOT SEEK ELECTION TO THEIR GOVERNING COUNCILS AND GENERALLY TRIED TO KEEP THEIR PRESENCE AS INCONSPICUOUS AND NON-CONTROVERSIAL AS POSSIBLE. WITH THIS TRULY "NON-ALIGNED" POLICY ESTABLISHED, THE GUB AVOIDED UNDUE BILATERAL PRESSURE TO SUPPORT OR OPPOSE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES BEFORE INTERNATIONAL FORA.

3. IN THE PAST YEAR, HOWEVER, WE HAVE SEEN SOMETHING OF A DEPARTURE FROM THIS POLICY AND A MOVE TOWARD A "THIRD WORLD" POSITION. IN THE 30TH UNGA, BURMA VOTED FOR THE PRO-NORTH KOREAN RESOLUTION WHILE ABSTAINING (AS IT ALWAYS HAD), ON THE US SPONSORED RESOLUTION. BURMESE CLAIMED THAT THIS SHIFT REFLECTED THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES IN OTHER COUNTRIES. IN FACT, WE SUSPECT MOVE IN PART REFLECTED ADJUSTMENT TO "NEW REALITIES" IN ASIA IN THE WAKE OF THE FALL OF INDOCHINA AND A DESIRE TO BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST POWERS IN THE REGION FOR VARIOUS REASONS. (SEE RANGOON 2778 AND 2595 FOR MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE GUB'S POSITION ON THE KOREAN ISSUE).

4. BURMESE HAVE ADMITTED THAT THEY ARE NOW TAKING A SOMEWHAT MORE ACTIVE FOREIGN POLICY LINE AND ARE TRYING TO STAY IN THE MID-STREAM OF THE NAC; THIS TOO COULD BE REFLECTED IN MORE SHIFTS AWAY FROM ABSTENTION ON CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS IF THE MAJORITY OF THE NAC'S ARE SUPPORTING (OR OPPOSING) A PARTICULAR ISSUE. THIS DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT BURMA IS ABOUT TO LAUNCH MAJOR INITIATIVES, SEEK KEY POSTS, ETC., IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES; GIVEN THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THEIR FOREIGN POLICY OF NON-INVOLVEMENT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY A VERY PASSIVE ROLE.

5. AS TO THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER COUNTRIES ON GUB DECISION MAKING, IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE GUB DOES NOT RESPOND READILY TO SUCH OUTSIDE PRESSURE; IN FACT, IT TENDS TO HARDEN THEIR POSITION. AGAIN, ON THE KOREAN QUESTION, OUR INCREASINGLY SHARP

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DECLARATIONS OF CONCERN, BOTH HERE AND IN WASHINGTON DURING THE UNGA HAD LITTLE APPARENT EFFECT ON THE BURMESE; THEY HAD PROBABLY "COSTED OUT" THEIR DECISION BEFOREHAND AND DECIDED THAT THEY COULD LIVE WITH U.S. UNHAPPINESS. THEY ALSO RECOGNIZED THAT THE U.S. HAS LITTLE LEVERAGE IN BURMA; SINCE THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT ASSISTANCE PROVIDED (NARCOTICS CONTROL EQUIPMENT) AS MUCH IN OUR OWN

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BENEFIT AS IT IS IN THEIRS. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT OTHER COUNTRIES WOULD HAVE MUCH MORE SUCCESS IN INFLUENCING THE GUB ALTHOUGH ON A REALLY SERIOUS ISSUE INVOLVING CHINA, THE PRC WOULD BE ABLE, IF IT CHOSE TO DO SO, TO MAKE ITS CONCERN FELT BY STEPPING UP SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY. INTERESTINGLY, IN THE KOREAN CASE, MFA OFFICIALS CLAIM THEY WERE NOT PRESSURED TO SUPPORT THE PRO-DPRK RESOLUTION BY EITHER THE USSR OR THE PRC. OTHER MAJOR POWERS LIKE THE USSR AND MAJOR AID DONORS SUCH AS JAPAN AND THE FRG PROBABLY WOULD HAVE LITTLE BETTER LUCK EVEN IF THEY WERE DISPOSED TO USE THEIR DIPLOMATIC AMMUNITION FOR SUCH PURPOSES (JAPAN AND THE FRG SUPPORTED US ON THE KOREAN QUESTION BUT WERE CERTAINLY NOT WILLING TO STOP OR REDUCE THEIR AID TO SHOW THEIR DISPLEASURE). AS TO BURMESE EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE OTHER, THESE ARE VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTANT GIVEN THEIR GENERALLY PASSIVE POSTURE.

6. CONCERNING GUB REPRESENTATION IN FOREIGN BODIES, BURMA LIKE MANY LDC'S SUFFERS FROM INADEQUATE COMMUNICATIONS (NOT TO MENTION ITS OWN PONDEROUS BUREAUCRACY) WHICH SOMETIMES RESULTS IN MIS-INSTRUCTION OF SIGNIFICANT TIME LAGS. ON THE ZIONIST ISSUE IN THE LAST UNGA, FOR INSTANCE, THE BURMESE DELEGATION VOTED FOR THE ANTI-ZIONISM RESOLUTION IN COMMITTEE, BECAUSE IT WAS WORKING FROM THE WRONG POSITION PAPER. THIS WAS CORRECTED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THE DELEGATION ABSTAINED IN THE PLENARY VOTE.. AGAIN, ON THE GUAM RESOLUTION, MFA OFFICIALS CLAIM THEY DID NOT RECEIVE THE TEXT IN TIME FOR ANALYSIS AND THEIR DELEGATION

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ACTED ON WHAT APPEARED TO BE A STANDARD "DECOLONIZATION" QUESTION WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT IN THE CASE OF SOME SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES SUCH AS THE LOS, THE DELEGATION DOES HAVE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF LEEWAY SINCE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S TOP EXPERTS ON THE SUBJECT USUALLY ATTEND THE CONFERENCE. HOWEVER, NO SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FROM ESTABLISHED POLICY IS LIKELY WITHOUT RANGOON'S APPROVAL.

7. AS TO GUB RECEPTIVENESS TO US INFLUENCE ON THESE QUESTIONS, WE CITED ABOVE OUR UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS ON THE KOREAN QUESTION. IN THAT INSTANCE, THE GUB NOTED OUR CONCERN (AS WELL AS THAT EXPRESSED BY THE JAPANESE, BRITISH, FRG AND OTHERS), BUT IT OBVIOUSLY DID NOT SWAY THEM FROM THEIR COURSE. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT WE ARE IGNORED, HOWEVER. ON OTHER QUESTIONS FARTHER FROM THEIR IMMEDIATE CONCERN, THEY WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO ADOPT THEIR TRADITIONAL POSITION OF ABSTENTION UNLESS THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE NAC'S GO ALONG; THE ABSENCE OF ANY EXPRESSION OF OUR VIEWS ON SOME ISSUES COULD BE MISINTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF USG DISINTEREST. BUT WE MUST RECOGNIZE WE HAVE LITTLE TO TRADE OFF. BURMA RARELY SEEKS OUR (OR ANYBODY ELSE'S) SUPPORT IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL BODIES; THE LAST INSTANCE WE CAN RECALL WAS THEIR REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF THEIR FORMER AMBASSADOR IN PARIS TO A MANAGERIAL LEVEL POSITION IN UNESCO, (HE DIDN'T GET THE JOB).

8. IN SUM, WE FEEL THAT BURMESE MAY BE MOVING SOMEWHAT OFF DEAD CENTER AND AWAY FROM THE U.S. ON SOME CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES EITHER BECAUSE OF THEIR REGIONAL CONCERNS OR BECAUSE THEY WISH TO STAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NAC CROWD. WHERE NEITHER OF THESE FACTORS IS OF PRIMARY CONCERN, THEY WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO ABSTAIN. DESPITE SOME RESTIVENESS AMONG YOUNG ACTIVISTS, SEASONED PROFESSIONALS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FAR PREFER THAT APPROACH WHICH SPARES THEM THE ARM TWISTING TO WHICH THEY WERE SUBJECTED LAST FALL ON KOREA; HOWEVER, POLICY DECISIONS OF THIS SORT ARE MADE WELL ABOVE THEIR LEVEL.
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